

1. Introduction

America needs a wake-up call about its workforce — because the trends that are impacting it will have huge economic consequences if we don't act on them. . . . That doesn't mean we should change everything. We still need to protect workers' safety and health, retirement security, and equal access to jobs and promotions. But we also need to be open to new and better ways to achieve those goals, taking into account how Americans actually work today.

Elaine L. Chao, Secretary of Labor
Summit on the 21st Century Workforce
June 20, 2001

At the Summit on the 21st Century Workforce, Secretary Elaine Chao challenged the Department of Labor (DOL) and its partners in State governments, labor organizations, and business to fulfill the DOL mission more creatively, proactively, and cooperatively. Indeed, the core purpose of the Department — “... to foster, promote, and develop the welfare of wage earners of the United States, to improve their working conditions, and to advance their opportunities for profitable employment” — has not changed, but the world and our country have. In this document, our FY 2004 Annual Performance Plan, we describe our efforts to pursue the mission of DOL in new and better ways to meet the needs of the 21st Century workforce. In particular, we emphasize certain areas, including:

- Emphasizing prevention of injuries, fatalities, and violations of labor laws through renewed compliance assistance efforts.
- Ensuring the security of workers' retirement programs and savings.
- Enhancing the effectiveness of job training and employment services through the reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act.
- Achieving the citizen-centered, results driven Department envisioned by the President's Management Agenda.

Our strategies for addressing the key issues facing the Nation's workers at present and in the immediate future are presented in the framework of the Department's three strategic goals, listed below.

DOL Strategic Goals	
Goal 1	<i>A Prepared Workforce</i> <i>Enhance opportunities for America's workforce</i>
Goal 2	<i>A Secure Workforce</i> <i>Promote the economic security of workers and families</i>
Goal 3	<i>Quality Workplaces</i> <i>Foster quality workplaces that are safe, healthy, and fair</i>

The Department is in the process of updating its Strategic Plan to incorporate a fourth strategic goal — *A Competitive Workforce* — that will serve as a blueprint for achieving Secretary Chao's vision for the 21st Century workforce. The Department will prepare the workforce to meet the challenges of the 21st Century through new partnerships and initiatives designed to enhance both workers' fundamental skills and advanced technical competencies. This plan describes the Department's goals and strategies relating to

several initiatives, including the introduction of common performance measures to compare the results of Federal job training and employment programs, the *New Freedom Initiative* to increase employment of persons with disabilities, and DOL's efforts to improve the results of job training programs by expanding the participation of faith-based and community organizations.

The Department will emphasize prevention and compliance assistance — to protect workers before they are harmed physically or economically. Consistent with the Department's commitment to enforcement, we will work together with employers on better prevention strategies, avoiding whenever possible the loss of life, health or economic well-being that fines and penalties can never fully redress.

This plan also reflects our commitment to improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the Department's programs by successfully meeting the challenges and opportunities outlined in the President's Management Agenda. The Government-wide reforms spelled out in the Agenda will strengthen the Department's business practices, fostering the delivery of high quality services to America's workers at the most reasonable cost. Chapter 6 provides details on the Department's approach and management goals to achieve an organization that is citizen-centered, results-oriented, and market-based.